



OUDS WELFARE MANIFESTO FOR STUDENT DRAMA

revised Sept 2023

This Manifesto is a combination of guidelines from Equity's 'Manifesto for Casting', Equality Law (2010) and the OUDS Welfare Officer.

If you have any concerns or questions about this Manifesto, or have any welfare concerns about drama in Oxford, please reach out to the OUDS Welfare Officer:

Emily Cullinan

welfare.ouds@gmail.com or emily.cullinan@exeter.ox.ac.uk

*The Manifesto will be available in accessible formats, as required, and circulated through as many channels as possible.**

OU DS Welfare is a point of contact for all students involved in Oxford Drama, providing formal and informal support. The welfare officer can act as a mediator, facilitating conversations to settle disputes, as well as offering support and advice on interpersonal matters or simply, being there for a friendly chat over a cup of tea. No worry or concern is too small! Any interaction can take place either in person or online, depending on what is most convenient. Welfare conversations are entirely confidential and will be treated with the utmost discretion.

Please note, the Oxford University Drama Society is student run and as such, we are not always fully equipped to deal with very sensitive issues or those which constitute violations of the University harassment policy. We will always endeavour to provide as much assistance as we can on every matter, but in cases where issues go beyond the capacity of our committee members, we will refer you on to the most suitable, trained person to ensure the highest level of support is provided.

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AUDITIONS

Casting Breakdowns and Production Advertisements

Where roles are advertised, the casting breakdown should be presented in the most inclusive way possible, following the OUDS audition guidelines.

Crew calls should be equally accessible. All productions should have a welfare officer working on the show. The welfare officer should not also be a cast member of the show.

Productions should take great care and consideration when casting roles where the artist's personal characteristics are relevant to the role, and this should be specified in the character requirements.

It should be made clear if the play or production includes any potentially distressing themes, and any sexual or violent action that may be required of performers in any role. Similarly, any audition scripts that have potentially distressing content should be clearly marked through a trigger or content warning. Event descriptions should make auditionees aware of the OUDS Welfare Officer and their contact information, as well as that of the show welfare officer.

It should be indicated that audition materials can be made available in accessible formats upon request (e.g. image captioning, audio versions, printing text on a different colour paper/background on a screen).

Advertising platforms other than Facebook and email should be used where possible, to avoid alienating those with visual impairments.

Access

The building where auditions are held should be accessible, and reasonable adjustments should be made to the audition process to ensure all performers can participate. Participants should be asked about access needs through a google form or similar, or given the opportunity to raise any issues.

Inclusive casting

Wherever possible, casting for productions should be reflective and representative of the diverse society in which we live. Consideration should be given to the ways casting can embody progressive change. Unless a particular identity is specifically stipulated in a text or relevant to a role, all auditionees should be considered equally. Have an open mind when casting - try not to go in with a particular image in mind of what that character will look like.

Productions, drama events, societies and forums must be advertised and conducted as welcoming, inclusive and open to everyone regardless of race, gender identity, class, socio- economic status, sexual orientation, nationality, age or disability. Further guidance in this sector can be found at:

<http://neropa.stieve.com/en/>

Cost of Time and Energy

Reasonable consideration should be given to the cost in time and energy to performers when attending auditions - what do they have to prepare? Is it reasonable within the framework of academic student life?

Those involved in the casting process have a responsibility to ensure all performers are given the opportunity to prepare properly and give their best. Scripts and materials should be made available in accessible formats (see 'Casting Breakdowns and Production Advertisements'). Production teams must consider that different university subjects may change students' autonomy over their schedule. Ample time should be given to those who have identified relevant access needs.

In long workshop auditions and callbacks, ensure that auditionees are given ample breaks to allow them to have enough energy to carry out the audition to the best of their ability.

Audition Panels

One-on-one auditions should be banned. Auditions must not take place in students'

private spaces (e.g. bedrooms).

The audition room should only include those involved in the production in some capacity.

The audition panel should consider ways of making potential first-time auditionees feel relaxed and welcomed (e.g. not using laptops in auditions, not placing the panel behind a table, using rooms that are not too difficult to find).

Audition Slots

Audition slots should be properly scheduled and allow sufficient time. **The panel should give equal time and energy to every audition.** The alternative of recording a self-tape should be allowed.

Nudity/simulated sex

No sexual act or simulation thereof should be requested at any audition. A performer should not be requested to undress in whole or in part.

No performer should be required to perform scenes with sexual or seductive content with the director or any production team member.

Actors should know if they may be required to appear nude or partly nude, or simulate any sexual or violent act in the production, *before* they put themselves forward for involvement.

If such scenes are included in the production, the way these rehearsals are scheduled, who will be in the room, and the nature of the rehearsal process should be openly discussed and agreed with all participants. An intimacy director should also *always* be involved in choreographing these scenes and it should be made clear to participants that intimacy choreography is to be followed exactly, with no room for improvisation or last-minute changes. In this case, the welfare rules of a rehearsal room should be agreed upon by the cast, crew and creative team ahead of time. It should also be made clear that individual production companies (which are independent from the Oxford University Drama Society) reserve the right to stage an intervention and/or remove any actor or crew member from the production if any of these rules are breached.

If you are unsure about whether your show needs an intimacy director, please get in touch with the OUDS Welfare Officer.

Auditionee Behaviour

Performers should not physically interact with members of the audition panel unless specifically prompted or directed to do so. Auditionees should also be sensitive and reasonable when physically interacting with other performers.

Questions that should not be asked in auditions (Equality Law)

In an audition, auditionees should not be asked about their age, disability or health, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status/civil partnership, religion, or pregnancy. Production teams only need to ask for this kind of personal information before an offer is made if it proves important to a job, e.g. if a particular characteristic is required for authenticity in a dramatic performance, or if a task that is central to the role can't be performed with reasonable adjustments.

Exceptions to this may be made when asking for pronouns. If pronouns are asked for this should be done for *each and every* auditionee.

Although auditionees should never be asked to provide any of said personal information, if such information is spoken about in a rehearsal or audition space it should remain confidential unless consent is specifically given to share it. The only exception to this is if any of the information indicates that the auditionee or anyone else could come to harm, in which case only appropriate parties should be contacted (e.g. the welfare officer in a society/university or the adult safeguarding team of the local area).

Outcome

Performers **must** be informed when they have not been offered a role. This must be done at the earliest opportunity. This is an act of basic respect for the time and investment they have put into the process.

Feedback

The option of feedback should be made available to non-successful applicants. (A suggestion: keep 2 sentences of concise feedback for each performer during the process in case it is requested.)

REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

Welfare Officer

At the start of the rehearsal process, a clear welfare system should be put in place. There should be a designated welfare contact within the production team, who can be approached in confidence with any concerns. This person should not be the director or producer, and should not be a member of the cast. Please note that any productions that do not have a welfare officer will not be considered for or granted OUDS funding until this is rectified. The cast and crew must also be made aware of the OUDS Welfare Officer, who can be approached at any time with any concerns. This is currently Carys Howell (ouds.welfare@gmail.com or carys.howell@worc.ox.ac.uk). Creating an atmosphere as non-hierarchical as possible is essential to ensuring that people feel comfortable in bringing forward concerns and as such, exercising caution when casting actors who have a personal connection (e.g. close friendship) to the production team is essential. There is no place for favouritism during the casting process.

Guidance for welfare officers on shows can be found [here](#).

Rehearsal Space and Time

Rehearsals should not take place in bars or student bedrooms. Rooms booked should be fully accessible to all cast members, and the cast should be informed if the rehearsal location has changed to somewhere further away or less accessible. Rehearsals can be intense, and not everyone may feel comfortable speaking up when they feel tired or need some time out. Breaks should be scheduled into rehearsals, and pre-agreed timings should be observed as much as possible. If timings for rehearsals need to be changed, let actors know with as much notice as possible and be understanding if some actors can no longer make the rehearsal.

Costumes

Costume fittings should be carried out with sensitivity and actors' sizes should be checked for in advance, with the option for blind-measuring, as well as any other costume requirements or preferences they may have. These conversations should not happen in front of everyone else. If someone has indicated a costume requirement, this should be respected and they should not be put in a position where they are made to feel like an inconvenience for making this request. The top priority is that the actors feel comfortable in what they are wearing - aesthetics of the show come second to this.

Sexual, Violent and Emotional Content

In rehearsal, any sexual, violent or highly emotional action must be explicitly agreed upon and rehearsed in a safe, consensual, collaborative context. All involved should be notified in advance of the rehearsal if there is going to be difficult content being covered. There should be no change to these agreed actions in performance. In rehearsal, the director shouldn't demonstrate such actions with one cast member in front of others.

If you are unsure about whether a professional intimacy coordinator is needed, the OUDS Welfare Officer should be contacted.

Before the play is cast, actors should be asked how comfortable they are with physical contact and these boundaries must be respected. Relevant content warnings should be provided to potential cast members at audition states.

If the show contains content warnings, it is important to advertise these on the shows marketing and programme, as well as physically at the venue. A fairly comprehensive list of potential content warnings can be found in the OUDS audition guidelines.

GENERAL

Discrimination and Offensive Language

Throughout the audition, rehearsal and performance process, discrimination and discriminatory language will not be tolerated. Production companies reserve the right

to expel any performer or crew member who uses racist, xenophobic, sexist, transphobic or homophobic language from their production. This includes in person and on online communication platforms (e.g. social media). All members of every production must be treated with respect and failure to do so by any crew or cast member will result in serious consequences.

Bullying and Harassment

As per the University Harassment Policy, each production must foster a positive environment in which people are treated fairly and with respect. Any behaviour which constitutes "violating another person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for another person" is unacceptable, including but not limited to "offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient." This covers verbal, physical and sexual harassment. Should this occur, any production company reserves the right to remove individuals from a production at any time. In these cases, disciplinary action is largely handled by individual colleges and by the Proctors on a University level - OUDS can offer support and resources to any survivors of harassment throughout the University-wide Complaints Procedure.

Feedback

If there is anything you would like to be included in this manifesto or more detailed welfare guidelines, please contact the OUDS Welfare Officer. It is really important that everyone feels their experience in drama is represented and OUDS are committed to making the society as inclusive and accessible as possible.

If you feel affected by any of the issues discussed in this Manifesto, please contact the welfare division of your society/university, or alternatively call the Samaritans on 116 123 (<https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you>).

Further information/links

Equity campaigns:

<https://www.equity.org.uk/campaigns/manifesto-for-casting/>

<https://www.equity.org.uk/campaigns/play-fair/inclusive-casting/>

<https://www.equity.org.uk/documents/agenda-for-change-report/>

Inclusive casting:

act-for-change.com

Text accessibility:

<http://www.ict4ial.eu/guidelines/making-text-accessible/how-to-make-textual-information-accessible>

Mental health support:

<http://www.artsminds.co.uk/>

*E.g. printed versions with different font sizes/layouts, an audio version, and versions with differently coloured text/background upon request. Where possible it should be circulated in non-electronic and non-printed formats as well as electronic and printed.